

Deaf Culture Question of the Week – August 29 – September 2, 2011
Bill Newell, Principal Washington School for the Deaf

Who is credited with introducing American Deaf culture to the practice of “hand waving” for applause?

- a. Laurent Clerc
- b. Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet
- c. Gerald “Bummy” Burstein
- d. Frederick Schreiber

Scroll down for the answer.

Answer: “c” - Gerald “Bummy” Burstein

The modern American Deaf culture practice of twisting the hands in the air evidently came to the U.S. from France in late 1985. In a magazine article, Gerald "Bummy" Burstein told of attending the 200th anniversary birthday celebrations for Laurent Clerc in France that November. Just prior to that, he attended the French Deaf people's national convention, and noticed that each presentation ended with "clapping" made by twisting the arms and hands above the heads. Impressed by this display of visual applause - which also followed his own presentation - he

told the story the following summer to participants in the 1986 Deaf Youth Leadership Camp in Minnesota. The campers and staff immediately picked up the French deaf applause and continued to use it themselves for the rest of the camp session. It spread throughout American Deaf Culture like a virus from there, and became especially prominent during the 1988 Gallaudet "Deaf President Now" protest and the 1989 "Deaf Way" international conference. [Cited from: http://www.gallaudet.edu/library/deaf_research_help/frequently_asked_questions_faqs/cultural_social_medical/history_of_visual_applause_for_the_deaf.html]

Bummy Burstein is well known in the Deaf community for his passion for “the Parliamentary Procedure” and running meetings according to Roberts Rules of Order. Read more about Bummy Burstein here:

http://www.ohsoez.com/sign_celebration/2010/presenter_bio.htm

See a picture of Bummy Burstein here:

http://www.gallaudet.edu/faculty-staff/guaa/burstein_gerald.html

Note: All previous issues of DCQW are archived at the Washington School for the Deaf website: <http://www.wsd.wa.gov>